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THE AUTHORSHIP OF THE FIFTY-FIRST PSALM.

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The Davidic authorship of the 51st Psalm is denied by modern rationalistic criticism. Ewald places it among "the songs of the dispersion of the people, and the destruction of the Kingdom." Hitzig ascribes it to the unknown writer of Isaiah XL-LXVI. DeWette assigns it to an unknown Exilian prophet, and Prof. W. Robertson Smith inclines to the same view. Olshausen and v. Lengerke sweep it into the Maccabæan period. All agree that David did not write it.

The superscription is, as we know, historical. It refers the Psalm to David, and to a well-known incident in his life. Its historical trustworthiness was accepted by the Jews from the earliest times. The reasons for denying its trustworthiness are both general and specific. Of the former the following are urged:

1. The Psalm does not allude to the affair of Bathsheba, nor to the specific sin of adultery. True, nor is it necessary that it should. Every one in the Kingdom knew what David's heinous sin, *פשע absolute wickedness*, was. As it is, every penitent heart can read its own sin into David's tearful confession.

2. A lack of conformity between the Psalm and the narrative in 2 Sam. XII. According to the latter, David is aroused from his sinful security by Nathan's coming. David confesses his sin, and is at once assured of God's forgiveness; but in the Psalm he is represented as imploring it most earnestly. This objection loses sight of the differ-

ence between a mere official announcement of pardon, and a sinner's conscious appropriation of the assurance of forgiveness; the one precedes the other by a longer or shorter interval.

3. The Psalm speaks of many sins, and cannot therefore be David's. Set beside this the objection that in v. 4 it speaks not of many sins, but of one sin against the Lord, and cannot therefore be David's, and the two objections cancel each other. David's sin against God branched out into many sins against his fellow-men; his sins against his fellow-men combined into one transcendent sin against God.

4. "The whole experience of David with Nathan moves in another plane. The psalmist writes out of the midst of present judgments of God (the Captivity)."* The first statement is simply not true, for the Psalm receives its only adequate interpretation from that very experience. The second statement, including the parenthesis, is a gratuitous assumption destitute of proof.

5. "The situation of the Psalm does not necessarily presuppose such a case as David's."† Neither does it necessarily presuppose any other case than David's. The Psalm fits into the known facts of his life as it does not fit into the life of any other known man. To attribute it to "a prophet laboring under a deep sense that he has discharged his calling inadequately, and may have the guilt of lost lives on his head," or to "collective Israel in the Captivity," is to force the Psalm into a fictitious situation demanded by the exigencies of a mere theory.

The more serious objections to the traditional interpretation are supposed to arise from a critical examination of particular words and phrases. Such objections are the following :

1. In the 14th verse (Heb. 16) the writer prays, "Deliver me from bloods (דָּמִים)." We know that David was constructively guilty of murder in procuring Uriah's death. To translate דָּמִים *blood-guiltiness*, or *guilt of murder*, would at once point to David as the author of the Psalm. Such an interpretation must be avoided. Reuss‡ translates the clause as a prayer for protection against "being murdered"! —a rendering for דָּמִים, for which no parallel exists in the whole range of Hebrew literature. Prof W. R. Smith§ asserts that the phrase "'Deliver me from blood-guiltiness' is to be understood after Ps.

* W. R. Smith's "The Old Testament in the Jewish Church." Lecture VII., note 11.

† *Ib.*

‡ Le Psautier, Paris, 1875.

§ *In loc. cit.*

XXXIX., 8, 'Deliver me from all my transgressions, and make me not the reproach of the foolish.'" If the phrases which are supposed to interpret each other were identical, still there would be no absolute certainty that the meaning was identical in the minds of the unknown writers, who, according to modern criticism, may have been widely separated in time and circumstances. But they are not identical. **הִצִּילֵנִי מִכָּל פְּשָׁעִי** in Ps. XXXIX., 8 is not the same as **הִצִּילֵנִי מִדָּמִים** in Ps. LI., 16, and to interpret the latter by the former is sheer folly, for **פְּשָׁעִים** is never synonymous with **דָּמִים**. The singular **דָּם** retains almost invariably the literal meaning *blood*. Gesenius and Fuerst (latest editions) explain the plural as meaning *Blutthat, a deed of blood*, **אִישׁ דָּמִים** *a bloodthirsty man*, whence it comes to mean in general *Blutschuld, blood-guiltiness*, and **בֵּית, עִיר דָּמִים**, *a house, a city upon which rests the guilt of blood*. So in later Hebrew the plural signifies *bloodshed, murder* (Levy, *neuhebräisches u. chald. Wörterbuch*). The LXX render it *τὰ αἵματα*, the plural being used in classical Greek, as in Hebrew, to denote *bloodshed, murder*. **דָּמִים** occurs not far from fifty times in the Old Testament, and in every instance has reference, directly or indirectly, to the shedding of innocent blood. In two instances other meanings have been suggested. The first occurs in Is. I., 15, "Your hands are full of bloods." But this very sense of blood-guiltiness, so far from being excluded, seems to be clearly indicated as the reason why Jehovah would not accept the sacrifices of his people. The other passage, Ezek. XVIII., 13, declares that a son who is a robber, a shedder of blood, and guilty of various other crimes, shall not live; "he shall surely die: his *bloods* shall be upon him." Gesenius refers to this passage under the definition *blood-guiltiness (Blutschuld)*. It does not mean in this instance "mortal sin," as Prof. Smith wishes to render it. The passage means simply, that, when the wicked son perishes, the responsibility for the loss of his life rests upon himself—the blood-guiltiness is upon him alone. When, therefore Prof. Smith affirms that "**דָּמִים** does not necessarily mean the guilt of murder," he affirms what is not true, for this is precisely what it does mean, and nothing but the necessity of perverting facts in the interest of a theory would have suggested giving to this word any other than its ordinary meaning.

2. "**יָשַׁע**," says Prof. Smith, "is, I believe, always used of some visible delivery and enlargement from distress. God's wrath is felt in chastisement, His forgiveness is the removal of affliction, when his people cease to be the reproach of the foolish." But **יָשַׁע** does not always

refer to visible deliverances (Ps. XXV., 5 : CXXXII., 9, 16. Cf. Delitzsch *in loc.*). Nor has it an exclusively national reference, as the above phrase "his people" adroitly insinuates. The word is used in the sense of personal deliverance no less than three times in the 18th Psalm. But the 18th Psalm is included by Ewald, Hitzig, and by Prof. Smith himself in the excessively small residuum of unquestionably Davidic Psalms. It follows that this word, so far as it gives any clew to the author of the 51st Psalm, points far more to David than to a later unknown prophet who sees in God's salvation nothing beyond an external saving act in behalf of the people.

3. "At present says the Psalmist God desires no material sacrifice, but will not despise a contrite heart..... He lives therefore in a time when the fall of Jerusalem has temporarily suspended the sacrificial ordinances."* The whole force of this objection lies in the tacit assumption contained in the phrase "at present," i. e., during the Captivity; the subsequent conclusion is only a formal statement of this unwarranted assumption. "Thou desirest not sacrifice," says the Psalmist. In the next phrase **וְאֵתֵנָּה** he implies a possession of the privilege of sacrifice, if with Ewald (Syntax § 347) and Driver (Heb. Tenses § 64) the **ו** be understood as the **ו** of sequence before the volutive—"that" or "so that I should give it"; if it be taken alternatively as in the E. V. and by Delitzsch and Perowne—"else would I give it"—this privilege is distinctly affirmed. The latter is the view of the LXX who translate "If thou desiredst sacrifice, I would have given it." The Psalmist is not debarred from sacrificing by lack of opportunity. All this about the temporary suspension of sacrificial ordinances is read into his words, which indicate that he in common with the godly in Israel perceived the nullity of ceremonies in the absence of a humble and penitent heart.

4. "The whole thought of the Psalm is most simply understood as a prayer for the restoration and sanctification of Israel in the mouth of a prophet of the Exile. For the immediate fruit of forgiveness is that the singer will resume the prophetic function of teaching sinners Jehovah's ways. This is little appropriate to David, whose natural and right feeling in connection with his great sin must rather have been that of silent humiliation than of an instant desire to preach his forgiveness to other sinners."† The anointing with oil signified to David and to Saul not only an official, but a prophetic endowment with the

* W. Robertson Smith, *in loc. cit.*

† W. Robt. Smith, *in loc. cit.*

spirit of God (1 Sam. x., 10; xvi., 13). David combined in a pre-eminent manner the royal and prophetic functions. By his psalms he became the great instructor and prophet of his people. The latter function was interrupted by his sin. His inner life was overclouded. The communion between his soul and God was broken. He had lost his way. He needed to be restored, to feel again the overflowing joy of God's salvation before he could begin to sing aloud of his praise or to teach transgressors his way. It is difficult to conceive of one to whom the prayer and vow in vs. 12 and 13 are more appropriate, than to this royal poet and prophet struggling out of Egyptian darkness into the sunshine of God's favor.

5. "Build thou the walls of Jerusalem." Reuss remarks, "The poet prays God to *rebuild* the walls of Jerusalem. The walls therefore are broken down." He sees in the last two verses convincing proof that so far as the whole Psalm is concerned "we are far from David's epoch." This is the conclusion of modern rationalistic critics generally. Many of those who unhesitatingly ascribe the body of the Psalm to David, feel constrained to ascribe the closing verses to a later author "who wished to accommodate this hymn to the circumstances of the people going into or returning from exile" (Maurer, *Com. in V. Test.*). In favor of the Davidic origin of these verses it may be said that "rebuild" is a *rare* (Fuerst) use of בנה; that it means more frequently *to strengthen, enlarge*, and that the Psalmist uses it in this sense. It may be said furthermore that the prayer is to be spiritualized, because the Psalmist perceives that unless God take pleasure in Zion and build the walls thereof "they labor in vain that build."* But these and similar suggestions fail to meet the case. In spite of all that can be said there is a palpable lack of harmony between these verses and those immediately preceding. The point of view is different. The former are written with a vivid recognition of the insufficiency of material sacrifices. These are not depreciated, but appreciated at their proper worth in comparison with the sacrifices of a broken spirit with which God is better pleased. The last two verses, while not precisely contradicting the former, seem to have been added, as Perowne suggests, "expressly to correct wrong inferences which might possibly have been drawn from verses 16, 17, as to the worth of sacrifices enjoined by the Law." In the one case, the point of view harmonizes with the lofty spiritual intuitions of the whole Psalm; in the other it relapses toward

* That the phrase וּבְחִי-צֶרֶק in the last verse is found also in the 4th Psalm, which is unquestionably Davidic, is not a decisive indication of authorship, as it occurs also in Deut. xxxiii., 19.

an external ritualism. There, if God desires material sacrifices, they are in readiness, which indicates that sacrifices flourished; here the twice repeated **אז** "then," pointing to a future restoration of Jerusalem, indicates that sacrifices had ceased. These and other discrepancies, to be felt rather than expressed, make it certain that the closing verses come from a later hand. Is this a valid reason for rejecting the Davidic authorship of the entire Psalm? Not at all. It shows that two lines of thought so divergent come from different sources. If the close of the Psalm be a post-exilic liturgical addition, the Psalm itself must have originated at an earlier time, when a freer and loftier view obtained respecting the spiritual value of sacrifices. The Psalm ends naturally and without abruptness with verse 19 (Heb.).

Thus far we have met objections. Are there any positive reasons for identifying the author of this Psalm with the poet-King of Israel?

1. The few intimations in the Psalm as to the life and character of the author correspond with what is known of David. The writer seems to have had a wide influence, since he promises to teach sinners Jehovah's ways. He was a poet of rare psychological penetration and of spiritual power. He had been guilty of one or more sins of peculiar heinousness, including the crime of shedding innocent blood. The Holy Spirit had been given to him, but his sin had almost driven that Spirit from his breast. Add to these facts the tone of profound penitence that breathes throughout the Psalm, the humble trust in God's mercy, and the eager striving to return to him, and we have a combination of circumstances that point to "the man after God's own heart," as they do not point to any other man.

2. We may reverse this process. A careful study of the life, character, and genius of David confirms the impression that we owe this song to him. Ewald's summary of David's character (Hist. of Israel, 3, pp. 57-58. Eng. Tr.) gives in every essential respect a wonderfully correct portrait of the author of the 51st Psalm.

3. There is a striking parallel between this Psalm and 2 Sam. XII. The first words which fell from David's lips after Nathan's "Thou art the man" had aroused him from his sinful torpor were **חטאתי ליהוה** "I have sinned against the Lord." Almost the first expression of the Psalm is "against thee I have sinned" **לך חטאתי**, in both instances a vivid apprehension of the nature of sin as being primarily against God. When Nathan asked "Wherefore hast thou despised the word of the Lord, to do this evil in his sight?" **לעשות הרע בעיניו**, we hear an immediate echo in the Psalmist's confession, "Against thee only have I

sinned, *and done this evil in thy sight*," וְהָרַע בְּעֵינַי עֲשִׂיתִי. In the words "That thou mightest be justified in thy speech, pure in thy judgment," there is a clear reference to the just judgments which God pronounced upon him (2 Sam. XII., 11, 14.) by the mouth of the prophet. The coincidences between the Psalm and the recorded history are too close to be accidental. They cannot be explained except by admitting that the author of the Psalm is also the leading actor in the history.

We have seen that the earlier as well as the later rationalistic criticism denies the Davidic authorship of this Psalm, but for different reasons. The earlier critics projected the whole Psalm into the period of the Captivity chiefly because of the last two verses; the later critics achieve the same result in the interest of a theory which makes the Pentateuch a forgery dating from the time of Ezra. In Prof Smith's special polemic against the Psalm he gives many reasons why it could not have come from David's hand; but the real reason is carefully concealed. It is this. If David wrote this Psalm, the Levitical code must have existed before his day; for there is hardly another Psalm which is so saturated with the spirit and phraseology of the Levitical legislation. The words טָהוֹר, בָּאוּב, חָטָא, טָהַר, כָּבֵס are peculiarly Levitical terms, which, though used in a spiritual sense, indicate a familiar acquaintance with the Mosaic ritual. This of course is fatal to the theory. Therefore the Psalm cannot be David's. The theory must be saved even if the word of God be made a lie.

The rationalistic criticism of this Psalm wrests it from the one recorded event in Old Testament history which above all others seems adapted to call forth such an utterance of overwhelming penitence; and from the one man who beyond all others could explore the dark secrets of the inward part, and report its hidden and far-reaching iniquities in terms of such unfeigned abhorrence, profound contrition, and humble reliance on Divine mercy, as put his penitential psalms, of which the 51st is chief, by themselves, unique, and unparalleled in the literature of the world. What is gained by it? Does it subserve any higher conceptions of religious truth, or even of secular history? The hallowed association of the Psalm are destroyed. Sever it from the personal experience of the man after God's own heart, swing it down the centuries to nobody knows where, credit it to nobody knows whom, strip it of individual reference by making it only an expression of sorrow for a nation's apostasies, and this grandest of penitential lyrics is at once shorn of its hitherto unapproachable power to mould the utterance of the soul's profoundest

consciousness of guilt. This power grows out of the essential identity of personal experience in all ages. But if the Psalm is not founded on the Psalmist's own experience, if it is not a voice crying from the abyss into which he sees himself plunged by sin, if it is only a lamentation over the idolatries of a sinful nation, it cannot, without perversion of thought, voice our consciousness of personal guilt.

If this Psalm does not come from the hand and heart of David, if it does not bear the unmistakable stamp of his genius, if it does not correspond with the known facts of his life, it is safe to say that one of David's Psalms is yet to be found.

THE LITTLE BOOK OF THE COVENANT.

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The book which Moses was commanded to write as the basis of the Covenant (Ex. XXXIV., 27), is called the little book of the Covenant, to distinguish it from the book which Moses wrote as the basis of the original Covenant at Sinai (Ex. XXIV., 4) which is called the greater book of the Covenant on account of its much greater extent. The latter embraces the section Ex. XX., 22,—XXIII., the former the section Ex. XXXIV., 11—26. This little book of the Covenant is scarcely larger than the tables of the Covenant (Ex. XX., 1—17). Indeed it is now the common opinion of critics that we have here another decalogue. It is true the critics differ in their arrangement of these commands, but as there have always been differences in the synagogue and the church as to the arrangement of the "Ten Commandments of the tables" such differences of opinion as to the arrangement cannot destroy the consensus as to their number in either case. There are some critics who hold that this decalogue was written upon the tables (Ex. XXXIV., 28), on account of "the words of the covenant", which seem to go back upon "write thou these words, for upon the basis of these words do I conclude a covenant with thee and with Israel" (v. 27); and also on account of the verb **וַיִּכְתֹּב** which has no subject expressed and where the most natural interpretation finds the subject in Moses, the subject of the verbs which immediately precede. This would then be the execution of the command given in v. 27. This would then force us to the conclusion that these tables contained the decalogue of vs. 11—26,